

New Jersey



NEW JERSEY'S RTT-ELC AGENDA, THE NJ

Plan, builds on ongoing state reform efforts to implement an aligned and coordinated high-quality system of early education and care with measurable impact for all of the state's high needs children from pregnancy through age eight.

Over the past two years, New Jersey has taken the best in program standards and practices from home visiting, state preschool, Early Head Start, and Head Start to develop an effective tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). In addition, New Jersey has made a commitment to place a greater emphasis on a system of care that supports infants, toddlers, and their families, increase its focus on health and family supports, and improve the quality of kindergarten to third grade programs. After submitting its proposal for the 2011 RTT-ELC competition, New Jersey's public and private partners continued meeting, discussing, and planning through the NJ Council for Young Children. The NJ Plan strengthens systems to coordinate services to meet the needs of its diverse population of infants, young children, and their families. With the collaboration of its agency partners, the Departments of Education, Health, Children and Families, and Human Services, the state has made a strong commitment to improving early learning for children with high needs, and has put in place a solid governance structure and set clear goals to build an accessible, high-quality early learning system.

At the core of the NJ Plan are four primary foci that will guide the state's early learning agenda:

1) High-Quality Programs

- a. Equip educators with common standards and supports.
- b. Elevate the quality of all programs through participation in Grow NJ Kids, the state's QRIS.

Applicant

Office of the Governor,
State of New Jersey

Lead Agency

New Jersey Department
of Education

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Total Federal Award

\$44,286,728

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January 1, 2014 –
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The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) discretionary grant program supports states in building statewide systems that raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs, so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Information in this abstract is drawn from the state's RTT-ELC grant application.

- c. Create a seamless PreK through third grade system.
- 2) Family Support
 - a. Provide health linkages and information to families and educators.
 - b. Empower families to support the development of children.
- 3) High-Quality Workforce
 - a. Align early education preparation programs with a workforce competency framework and career lattice.
- 4) Data-Driven Decision-Making
 - a. Ensure that Grow NJ Kids differentiates quality.
 - b. Capture skills at kindergarten entry.
 - c. Improve the ability to understand outcomes using connected data.

New Jersey's evidence-based early learning and development standards, when completed and aligned, will serve as guideposts for both early education and development programs and families, as they seek to help infants and young children in the culturally and linguistically diverse state of New Jersey meet appropriate milestones and prepare for school.

The Family Engagement Standards plan will provide tools to help high needs families obtain access to high quality early learning and development programs and empower them to be leaders in their child's overall growth and development.

New Jersey will set clear expectations for what early childhood educators should know by refining the New Jersey Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework and integrating it with the myriad of early childhood workforce preparation programs.

The New Jersey Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NJKEA) will serve as the pivotal focal point that will provide a metric of how well the state's early learning and development system is working to close the school readiness gap and how and where to make improvements in a timely, productive way, thereby serving as a tool that assists teachers in informing instructional decisions.

New Jersey addressed the following Focused Investment Areas in its application:

*Early Learning
and
Development
Standards*

(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards. New Jersey has made progress in designing infant/toddler and preschool standards that meet all essential domains of school readiness, in addition to adopting the Common Core State Standards. New Jersey will complete the alignment of these standards, disseminate the new infant/toddler standards to early learning and development programs statewide, produce multilingual guides to the standards that are useful for the

diverse families of New Jersey, and conduct training of early childhood educators on the standards.

*Health
Promotion*

(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of children with high needs to improve school readiness. While New Jersey has prioritized the investment in and development of certain areas of focus, the state has lacked the capacity to fully coordinate the multitude of programs that are available to high needs children and their families. RTT-ELC funds will be used to help the state meet this need by expanding its capacity to link high needs children, families, early childhood educators, and health care providers with referrals to and follow-up of all types of health services (physical, social-emotional, etc.) and by providing ongoing training and education on evidence-based standards that encompass a “whole-child” approach to readiness for school and life.

*Family
Engagement*

(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families. New Jersey will expand the best practices from the state preschool program, Head Start, and home-visiting programs to other early learning and development programs and the families they serve to empower families to be leaders in their child’s development. New Jersey has included family engagement standards in the pilot of the Grow NJ Kids tiered QRIS, but RTT-ELC funds will help translate those standards into meaningful, user-friendly formats for high needs families and train the program leaders who will put them into practice. The funds also will help assess the degree to which New Jersey is actually reaching its intended targets.

*Establish
Workforce
Knowledge and
Competency
Framework*

(D)(1) Developing a workforce knowledge and competency framework and a progression of credentials. New Jersey will refine the New Jersey Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework and career lattice and integrate them into all sectors of early childhood workforce preparation. This process will facilitate the calibration of the quality and types of coursework being offered.

*Kindergarten
Entry
Assessment*

(E)(1) Understanding the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry. New Jersey is currently in the second year of a pilot of the NJKEA and plans to implement the NJKEA statewide by September 2019. The instrument will allow New Jersey to understand children’s development upon entry to kindergarten and, with parent input, will be used to create individualized learning plans for children. New Jersey will integrate more and better professional development around the assessment tool. New Jersey will assess the degree of alignment between the NJKEA, preschool standards, and kindergarten standards.

*Build or
Enhance Data
Systems*

(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies. New Jersey’s restructured

governance system will be reflected in the way it gathers, analyzes, and utilizes the myriad types of data it collects. To this end, the state's Data Committee has undergone detailed preparation to create the New Jersey Enterprise Analysis System for Early Learning (NJ-EASEL) data warehouse so that it will align with NJ SMART (the state's longitudinal data system) and all the other state data systems that collect information on high needs infants and young children. RTT-ELC funds will allow New Jersey to finish this work by aligning the systems and building its capacity to collect and analyze the data so it can understand the key outcomes identified as important to measure—and to ensure this work continues indefinitely in the future.

New Jersey has 185,688 children, birth to kindergarten entry, from low-income families. The state reports that it is leveraging \$83,095,241 in other funding sources to support this effort.